

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 5, 2021

9:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Roger Holland, Chair
Senator Gary Stevens, Vice Chair
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Peter Micciche
Senator Tom Begich

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 19

"An Act extending the special education service agency; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 19

SHORT TITLE: EXTEND SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) STEVENS

01/22/21	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
01/22/21	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/21	(S)	EDC, FIN
02/05/21	(S)	EDC AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

TIM LAMKIN, Staff
Senator Gary Stevens
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis for SB 19.

PATRICK PILLAI, Executive Director
Special Education Service Agency (SESA)

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information on SESA during the hearing on SB 19.

KRIS CURTIS, Legislative Auditor

Division of Legislative Audit

Alaska State Legislator

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented findings of the SESA audit during the hearing on SB 19.

HEIDI TESHNER, Director

Finance and Support Services

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Explained the fiscal note for SB 19.

JIM SLATER, Parent

Pelican, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified on the importance of SESA's work during the hearing on SB 19.

BEN GRIESE, Special Education Teacher

Southwest Region School District

New Stuyahok, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Described how SESA supported him as a special education teacher during the hearing on SB 19.

LUCY HOPE, Special Education Administrator

Mat-Su Valley

POSITION STATEMENT: Described the importance of SESA during the hearing on SB 19.

SAM CROW, Parent

Bethel, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Described the impact of SES during the hearing on SB 19.

LISA VILLANO, President

Alaska Council for Exceptional Children

Shishmaref, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified about the importance of SESA during the hearing on SB 19.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[9:02:33 AM](#)

CHAIR ROGER HOLLAND called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Stevens, Begich, and Chair Holland. Senators Hughes and Micciche arrived during the course of the meeting.

SB 19-EXTEND SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY

[9:03:09 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 19 "An Act extending the special education service agency; and providing for an effective date."

His stated his intent was to introduce the bill, hear invited testimony, review the legislative audit report, and understand the fiscal note. He asked Senator Stevens to introduce the bill.

[9:03:35 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS, speaking as sponsor of SB 19, said the bill provides for an extension of SESA, the Special Education Service Agency, which provides an impressive and valuable public service to students and families in Alaska. SESA offers expert assistance to children with rare or complex disabilities. SESA is based in Anchorage and provides services statewide. The last extension of SESA was in 2013. As a former school board president, he knows the value of the services SESA provides to school districts. In the last year SESA provided services to 45 school districts and more than 3,000 students across the state and 320 onsite consultations with school districts. The organization is of tremendous value to Alaska's children and parents and teachers and school districts. This bill will extend the sunset date eight years to June 30, 2029. The committee will hear about the impressive work of SESA from its Executive Director Patrick Pillai and will hear from the legislative auditor, Kris Curtis.

[9:05:54 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, said this is an opportunity to recognize an agency that does a lot with relatively little. It is not just an agency but a community of people that do a unique and special set of services for severely disadvantaged youth who, for example, are deaf and blind, severely autistic, or managing a spectrum of other severe and unique disabilities. There is lot of trust and respect for what SESA does. It is a sensitive subject area that requires a lot of passion, care,

patience, grace, and, frankly, love. The bill is straightforward. It extends its operations to 2028. The year is an error. That should be changed to 2029. SESA responded well to the last audit. The new audit illuminates SESA's success and efficacy.

MR. LAMKIN said that Section 1 extends the operations to June 30, 2028. That was a typographical error in the drafting process. It was intended to be 2029. At some point an amendment should change that. Section 2 provides for a retroactive effective date in the event that it doesn't pass this session and once it does pass, would provide for an immediate effective date.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked for clarification on the date.

MR. LAMKIN said the bill currently reads June 30, 2028. It should be changed to June 30, 2029, consistent with statute and standard sunset provisions.

[9:08:50 AM](#)

At ease

[9:10:25 AM](#)

PATRICK PILLAI, Executive Director, Special Education Service Agency (SESA), Anchorage, Alaska, said he has been the executive director of SESA for the past nine years. He joined the agency in 1994 as a deaf education specialist, making this his 27th year of SESA service.

MR. PILLAI presented the homepage of SESA's website on slide 2. The website provides online access to program services and resources, a lending library, online professional development e-modules, and an easy process for school districts to submit online referrals for SESA service. The agency's mission statement reflects the agency's focus on addressing the unique special education needs of students, parents, and teachers across Alaska's 54 school districts, via year-round onsite and distance delivered consultation and training.

[9:12:00 AM](#)

At ease

[9:12:19 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND noted the committee was having technical difficulties with the audio.

MR. PILLAI moved on to slide 3. SESA's legacy of special education support evolved from the intent of Public Law 94-142, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975, which was reauthorized in 2004 and amended in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act. The law mandates a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities. SESA activity assists parents and school district staff and makes tangible, through specialized educational interventions, the services mandated by special education law.

9:13:47 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND recognized the arrival of Senator Hughes.

MR. PILLAI said, addressing slide 4, that the statute establishing SESA specifically addresses technical assistance and service to students with low incidence disabilities. Low incidence disabilities is defined in the literature as occurring in less than 1 percent of the total population. Because of the rarity of the disability, the special education services are therefore not normally available in a district. An example is a situation with one child with deafness in a rural school district, with no access to a sign language interpreter, and a special education teacher with no prior experience working with a deaf child. SESA affords such sites access to a specialist with an endorsement in deaf education. In addition to consultation, support, and training, other supplementary services are available, e.g., assistance with applications for minigrants, programming and setting up assistive technology, cross district trainings, etc.

MR. PILLAI explained, speaking to slide 5, that although AS 14.30.630(b) states that SESA shall focus on provision of low incidence disability services, it does under eligibility of service in AS14.30.350 indicate that SESA may provide services to disability categories other than low incidence disabilities. It is through this qualification that SESA provides services to students with autism. School district requests for autism services currently comprise a SESA autism caseload exceeding 100 students. Requests for in-servicing staff on the topic of autism continues to increase each year. Many requests are for schoolwide or districtwide trainings when numbers of students with autism are high. Larger districts have higher numbers. Anchorage has 700, Fairbanks has 169, Kenai has 110, Juneau has 78, and Kodiak has 38 students with autism. Most rural remote schools have numbers that range from 0 to 23.

MR. PILLAI said, addressing slide 6, that SESA's logic model captures the design of process to deliver specialized services to parents, students, and school districts. The intent is to address the gap via solutions that promote not only availability of SESA services, but also increase, through onsite and distance support, the local capacity of the individual site and the school district. This approach is critical to meeting the needs of rural schools and of creating broad participant training to address staff turnover. Through trainings provided to school districts via common platforms, collaboration and networking amongst teachers and paraprofessionals is increased. This leads to sharing of resources, reduces isolation, and ultimately promotes retention of teachers, especially in rural remote areas of the state.

[9:17:18 AM](#)

MR. PILLAI described with slide 7 how, as part of the operational process, SESA created benchmarks to guide specialist delivery of a high standard of service. The benchmarks provide a threshold of expectation and guide specialist evaluation for continuous improvement. A flow of service delivery includes:

- Initial contact with district staff to establish relationship, identify site need, to plan technical assistance.

- Complete activities of file maintenance and compliance review

- Prioritize site need as targeted (some local capacity but site needs service), intensive (no local capacity and greatest need for service), general (capacity present but needs minimal guidance on how to proceed).

- Create a technical assistance objective based on review and site communication.

- Provide technical assistance and training as needed.

MR. PILLAI explained that slide 8 demystifies technical assistance. The continuum of services includes observations, assessments, educational interventions, modeling of strategies, in-service trainings, assistive technology, and many more pertinent activities based on requests from the child's educational team members. It also includes other services such as assisting families when they visit Alaska Native Medical Center for medical services, organizing and facilitating orientation and mobility training in the larger city of Anchorage for students to learn to navigate pavements, street lights, and traffic. Specialists also work with vendors to

troubleshoot assistive technology when teachers call with complaints of device nonfunctionality.

MR. PILLAI said, addressing slide 9, that using feedback from SESA's annual public audit and sunset legislative audits, SESA has designed a management system to include metrics for program and specialist evaluation. Postservice satisfaction surveys are emailed to service recipients and are available on each specialist's I-pad to make service feedback easier to collect. Feedback is shared and discussed with individual specialists, and collective information is shared with all specialists for continuous improvement of individual and agencywide performance.

MR. PILLAI said, continuing on to slide 10, that in addition to specialist evaluation, the SESA management system is designed to collect data on various aspects of agency activity. An activity is designated as any service contact that is 15 minutes or more. Service contact less than 15 minutes is captured in communication logs. Metrics include activities that are related to travel, creation of educational materials, or mission centric activities and writing of student service reports. Data is analyzed to understand variables impacting service and variables impacting the SESA budget.

9:20:36 AM

MR. PILLAI explained that slide 11 is a visual example of the customized management system SESA has designed to ensure data-driven decision making. Individual reports provide data on specialist activity allowing for measurement of productivity, the number of reports completed within agency timeframe of 10 working days from date of site visit, schools and sites requesting service, active and historical student caseloads by district, location and school, etc.

MR. PILLAI said, addressing slide 12, that both legislative audits and the program component of annual public audits run tests of compliance with regard to process, procedure and special education laws and regulations. This section of the database was created in response for specific data and with feedback from auditors. Following a recommendation of the SESA Board to go green, SESA management worked to eliminate paper files. All of SESA's student record keeping is now electronic. The compliance element of the SESA database drives quarterly compliance reviews. This section of the database consistently earns praise from auditors for its elegant simplicity of compliance review.

MR. PILLAI described how the graph on slide 13 captures, in red, the number of students attending Alaska's schools, in any given year between 2011 and 2020. The solid blue line captures the steadily increasing numbers of students on SESA's low incidence disability (LID) caseload. Increasing numbers of students with LID means greater need for SESA services. High turnover of staff in many districts often drives the need for repeated trainings for new staff, especially first year teachers who may be encountering any given disability for the first time.

MR. PILLAI explained that the graph on slide 14 shows the history of SESA fund balance from 2013 and projected to 2023. The cycle captures the low funds, usually seen at the end of a sunset cycle (2013), the higher funds at the middle of the cycle, and the trending to lower fund balance at the end of the cycle as a result of increasing costs. The typical scenario is slightly different in 2021 due to two premium holidays of health insurance, two unfilled specialist vacancies, and unspent travel funds due to COVID-19. In addition, SESA received \$175,000 in discretionary funding from the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to assist SESA to add two new specialists in 2019 and to assist creation of a fund balance beyond sunset, without knowing when a funding increase may next be feasible. SESA's last funding increase was in 2014. At this time, SESA is not requesting an increase of funding.

[9:23:57 AM](#)

MR. PILLAI said, moving on to slide 15, that the recently completed legislative audit concurs that SESA meets the needs of students with low incidence disabilities, provides professional development opportunities to teachers and paraprofessionals, provides special education resources to parents and school district staff, and concludes with a recommendation for an eight-year legislative reauthorization.

[9:24:26 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND recognized the arrival of Senator Micciche.

MR. PILLAI said that SESA is requesting reauthorization to continue providing the key services identified by the state of Alaska as being important to the full academic and social development of a child with a disability. This includes all the activities of technical assistance reviewed earlier in the presentation. SESA's customized database allows it to run reports of agency productivity. Slide 17 captures activities of technical assistance, the number of schools and districts served, the number of trainings (customized and general)

conducted onsite and via distance delivery, and an analysis of funds saved with SESA's investment in technologies of distance delivery. Savings are more than indicated on slide 17 since savings are also realized with site consultation provided via distance delivery.

SENATOR BEGICH asked for the number of students in Mat-Su to be repeated. He asked Mr. Pillai about the impact of the pandemic to SESA services, such as reduction in the travel, and how that was addressed.

MR. PILLAI replied that he didn't have the numbers on hand but would try to find them.

MR. LAMKIN answered that the legislative audit report on page 28 indicates that SESA serves three students in the Mat-Su. Statutorily, when districts hit a threshold of 10 students, districts must provide those services themselves. In this case SESA serves three deaf-blind students.

MR. PILLAI replied that is correct and added 271 students in the Mat-Su have autism.

SENATOR BEGICH asked how SESA is responding to the odd circumstances of this pandemic.

MR. PILLAI answered that one of the most important things was that the number of requests for services went down. Teachers are not working with students who are in rural locations. That upset the apple cart with the school situation, followed by more direct requests for services from parents. SESA ended up working with more parents and tutoring a lot of teachers with the technology and creating a lot of materials for parents working in the home situation. Services changed from typical in-service and observations in classrooms to more immediate solutions for teachers working with students removed from the classroom.

[9:28:48 AM](#)

SENATOR STEVENS said he was very interested in learning the impact of COVID on students who were not in classroom in front of teachers. He asked Mr. Pillai if he had given the number of specialists in his agency and the caseload, and what he sees as future needs for SESA.

MR. PILLAI answered that SESA serves about 350 students across the state. The highest numbers occur in multiple disabilities and autism. The more challenging need for school districts is

for the more intensive disabilities, such as deaf-blindness and multiple disabilities. A lot of SESA's response depends on what is going on in the state in that particular year. When many teachers are retiring, there is a whole new cadre of specialists who come into the districts. Specialists who graduated last year did not have full practicums because of COVID. They are in the first year of teaching with theoretical knowledge but sometimes missing the practicum. That is when they call SESA for help. On other hand, some special education teachers with 15 to 20 years of experience may encounter a deaf-blind child for the first time or a child with autism at the end of spectrum. At the beginning of the year, in August and September, superintendents usually call SESA for in-service training for the entire staff, such as when there is a high number of students with autism. Services range from one-on-one technical assistance, small group technical assistance, to full district technical assistance. In the immediate future, he thinks SESA will be doing more trainings for teachers because they are new and have not encountered the various disabilities in their classrooms.

9:31:47 AM

SENATOR HUGHES shared that many years ago she was a one-on-one aide for a severely disabled student in Ft. Yukon. It was very challenging. She appreciates what he is doing for these children and young adults. Her daughter has severe hearing loss. A number of years ago she received some services through the school, but after she was out of high school the family had to figure things out on their own. They went to Vocational Rehabilitation services as she was starting college to get help with the some of the accommodations she needed. She asked if SESA provides any bridge to assist high school students as they move out of the public school system.

MR. PILLAI answered that SESA follows the special education handbook. With that sequence, SESA encourages schools to put in place transition goals early on and then in high school work closely with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). DVR is more responsible for the transition from school to college, but advocacy skills are important for students. Once students have an IEP (Individualized Education Program) they can work with the disability office in colleges and get some of those same accommodations.

MR. LAMKIN presented a five-minute video introducing SESA specialists for autism impairment services, multiple disabilities, emotional disturbance, vision and orientation and mobility programs, and deaf and hard of hearing services.

9:40:53 AM

At ease

9:41:30 AM

Chair Holland reconvened the meeting.

KRIS CURTIS, Legislative Auditor, Division of Legislative Audit, Alaska State Legislator, Juneau, Alaska, said that she completed a sunset audit of SESA dated April 2020. The purpose of a sunset audit is to determine whether a board or agency is serving the public's interest and whether it should be extended. The background information section of the audit begins on page 5. SESA was created to help Alaska's school districts provide special education services to individuals with a low incidence disability. A low incidence disability occurs in less than one percent of the national school-aged population and the disabilities are more severe in nature and require specialized educational intervention.

MS. CURTIS said that SESA was established as a nonprofit corporation whose governing authority is the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, which is housed within the Department of Health and Social Services. However, SESA's primary service for the low incidence disability is budgeted and funded through Department of Education and Early Development. This funding is independent of the intensive needs funding school districts may otherwise receive as part of their annual education funding. SESA's funding provides additional financial support to help ensure students affected by low incidence disabilities are receiving the free and appropriate public education required by state and federal laws. SESA services are available to districts whose low incidence special education needs occur infrequently, making it difficult for the district to serve the low numbers of students in need of a particular service. SESA recruits, trains, and retains education specialists to provide technical assistance and training to parents, students, and district staff without regard to location in the state. Page 8 of the audit has a map that shows the number and location of students served by SESA. In total, SESA served 355 students as of February 2020.

MS. CURTIS pointed out that Appendix B on page 28 shows the number of students served by SESA by district and the category of disability. Report conclusions begin on page 11. Overall, the audit concludes that SESA is serving the public's interest by assisting school districts in providing students affected by

low-incidence disabilities an education to meet the children's unique needs. This is done by providing opportunities to enhance school district teachers' and paraprofessionals' capabilities and by providing resources. Legislative Audit recommends the legislature extend SESA's eight years, which is the maximum allowed in statute.

MS. CURTIS said that as part of the audit, a survey was sent to all special education directors for the 51 school districts. Fifty-nine percent responded. In general, the special education directors viewed SESA expertise, staff availability, and services favorably. Survey questions and responses are summarized in Appendix C of the audit.

MS. CURTIS stated that page 13 of the audit explains SESA's statutory funding mechanism. SESA's funding for its low incidence disabilities program is calculated by multiplying \$18.65 times the state's student average daily membership (ADM). This rate of \$18.65 was set in 2013 when the agency was last extended and has not increased. Given inflation, the funding will go down as wages go up, etc., if no inflation is built into the formula.

[9:47:16 AM](#)

At ease

[9:49:03 AM](#)

Chair Holland reconvened the meeting.

SENATOR MICCICHE pointed out that Ms. Curtis spoke about the funding mechanism on page 13, yet the Average Daily Attendance has been dropping since 2017. The attendance, which is the funding mechanism, is dropping but the caseload is increasing. He asked how that could collide as a funding issue.

MS. CURTIS answered that it is interesting that the ADM has been decreasing because during the review it was staying stagnant. The rate stayed stagnant and the membership stays stagnant, so the funding stayed stagnant for the period legislative audit was looking at. If attendance goes down, that will have significant impact given the calculation formula for this funding. Between 2012 and 2020 SESA's caseload increased by 66 percent yet its funding level never changed.

SENATOR MICCICHE responded that is something that the legislature will possibly need to look at, separate from this sunset bill.

MS. CURTIS said that SESA education specialists serving certain student categories were experiencing high caseloads. The audit notes that the agency was having trouble retaining and recruiting. Their wages and health benefits were below Anchorage's. The audit notes that SESA increased wages and improved health benefits. This will help the agency retain and recruit individuals and reduce vacancies.

MS. CURTIS disclosed that the audit has one recommendation that SESA's executive director implement written procedures to ensure the reclassification of a student's referred disability is adequately supported and communicated to school district personnel. Auditors reviewed 42 students' files and found five students' disabilities, as identified in the school district referral form, were reclassified by a SESA education specialist with no documentation in the file to explain the reclassification. Four of these five student files had no documentation to show SESA staff had communicated the students' revised disability category to school district personnel. That is an easy administrative fix.

MS. CURTIS concluded by stating that the responses to the audit begin on page 35. The commissioners of the Department of Education and Early Development and the Department of Health and Social Services and the chair of SESA concurred with the report conclusions and recommendation.

CHAIR HOLLAND asked Ms. Teshner to walk through the fiscal note.

9:53:07 AM

HEIDI TESHNER, Director, Finance and Support Services, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, said the committee should have one fiscal note for OMB component number 2735. The governor's FY22 budget request includes a projected grant amount of \$2,404,400 for SESA based on the statutory calculation. She will repeat what Ms. Curtis said. Per AS 14.30.650, the funding for SESA is determined by multiplying \$18.65 by the Average Daily Membership in the preceding fiscal year as determined in AS 14.17.600. For FY22, the projected grant of \$2,404,400 was determined by multiplying the FY2021 projected ADM, which was \$128,923.91, by \$18.65. Because the extension goes out June 30, 2028, according to the current version of SB 19, the department will adjust each budget cycle to reflect the accurate amount based on the statutory formula.

CHAIR HOLLAND called on invited testimony.

9:55:18 AM

JIM SLATER, Parent, Pelican, Alaska, said he lives in Pelican with his wife and three kids. The youngest, Jim, has been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Mr. Slater said he is also the president of the Pelican School Board. The Pelican City School District is one of the smaller school districts in the state with no specialists trained to educate children in the spectrum or children with other disabilities. Before SESA entered the picture, they only dealt with coordinators who would facilitate the development of an IEP and testers who would set benchmarks, but they had no regular input from specialists who could establish, monitor, and if necessary, modify actual curriculum. This left a huge gap in the implementation of the IEP. SESA provided crucial input into the IEP but also provided to them as parents, as well as the school's teachers, an ongoing source of information regarding Jim's progress, suggestions of how to modify the curriculum, and in several cases, even supplied material from its lending library. SESA's help was especially crucial during the pandemic when school shut down and they went to an at-home model. SESA's John Barrowman, along with Mr. Slater's wife, taught Jim for a short time every day. After this daily appointment with John, Jim continued the rest of the day following SESA's guidance. The results were overwhelming. Jim progressed several grade levels in math in six months. They have more recently engaged the SESA reading specialist and are seeing big advancements there. Their school is back in session and SESA continues to engage on a weekly basis with Jim and his teachers. This model of regular remote engagement is effective and efficient. The state should fund and even expand SESA's operations. He cannot overemphasize the value SESA provided to his son's education. Without SESA, Jim would not receive the education he needs and deserves. This is true for all the students SESA serves.

9:58:23 AM

BEN GRIESE, Special Education Teacher, Southwest Region School District, New Stuyahok, Alaska, said that in 2009 he started his first teaching job as a special education teacher in New Stuyahok, serving 140 preK-12 students. A number of students have low incidence disabilities this year. Rural Alaska presents a unique challenge due to limited access to material and services. His first week of teaching was overwhelming. He was unequipped to deal the number of disabilities in his first teaching position. SESA staff are vetted and experts in their fields. They are willing to go above and beyond. They provided

him with training, communication devices, paperwork help, and connected him to other professionals. They provide connections for families. SESA provided support in and out of school. During the pandemic distance services and support have helped him meet the needs of his students. In 2014 he was the Governor's Council for Exceptional Children Teacher of the Year and in 2018 the Governor's Council Inclusive Practice award winner. In 2020 he was the alternate Teacher of the Year. The reason he is able to be successful as a special education teacher is because of SESA. He does not think he would still be in Alaska without SESA support. SESA is necessary and needed. SESA helps lead disability awareness programs that have helped his community become even more accepting of students with disabilities. One of his students was able to use his assistive communication device to speak at graduation.

10:02:28 AM

CHAIR HOLLAND congratulated him on his accomplishments.

SENATOR MICCICHE asked why the bill has an extension for a year less.

SENATOR STEVENS answered that was a mistake in drafting and he will ask for an amendment to change that to 2029.

CHAIR HOLLAND added that was mentioned earlier.

SENATOR MICCICHE observed that looking at the math and the trend of SESA finances, assuming the ADM remains steady, illustrates that the legislature will have to think of some way to keep the funding for SESA consistent. He enjoys the presence of SESA students in his kids' schools. He is a great supporter of the program and is amazed at the effectiveness. The legislature will need to deal with the funding issue if the drop in ADM trend continues. The impacts could be significant much earlier than 2029. The legislature will need to think about that.

SENATOR BEGICH added that he would need to check with Ms. Teshner, but if the legislature does an early education bill, that will add to the ADM to some degree and mitigate the precipitous decline that Senator Micciche has identified. There are a number of tools in toolbox that the legislature could use to address it. There was no request in the audit or from the executive director for an increase at this time, but he asked whether a SESA increase can be done outside of the reauthorization.

MS. CURTIS noted that she does believe that the last extension bill included an increase to the rate in the statute. There was an amendment to do that, perhaps out of Senate Finance.

SENATOR BEGICH asked if that can happen without the extension bill.

MS. CURTIS answered that changing a statute can be done through any mechanism. The background information on page 2 of the report notes that there are other funding sources. SESA receives federal grants and other pockets of money, but LID is its main program.

10:06:49 AM

LUCY HOPE, Special Education Administrator, Mat-Su Valley, said that she has been working in special education in Alaska for 40 years and worked with SESA throughout her career. Many teachers in the state do not have training with students with low incidence disabilities. She was the Special Education Director of Mat-Su School District until about a year-and-a-half ago and was the contact person for SESA. SESA was always responsive and professional and on-target with what services it could provide. In Mat-Su, because it is a large district, that was limited to working with students with dual sensory impairments, students who experience both deafness and blindness. SESA always provided the expertise so the staff could work with those students and provide a free and appropriate education. She is now working with Aleutians East Borough School District and SESA has provided expertise working with students in that district in a very different environment. She has been impressed and grateful for the guidance from SESA specialists over the past two years. They recommend and provide curriculum materials training, provide strategies and training for staff and for parents, which is crucial. The distance support has been a precursor to teachers becoming confident and facile with teaching in a distance manner. SESA was doing that long before the pandemic. The past 11 months SESA visits to districts have not been possible, but SESA has not waived in providing the meaningful and necessary guidance.

SENATOR STEVENS said, "I am so impressed every time I hear what SESA does. And I know all of us are. . . It is a very impressive agency. I am only sorry that others in the Senate cannot hear this testimony because it is very moving. Just imagine what Alaska would be without this agency."

10:11:02 AM

SAM CROW, Parent, Bethel, Alaska, said that SESA has been so impactful. He is the father of a visually impaired sixth grader. He has 25 years in teaching and administration in the Lower Kuskokwim School District. Since his son entered kindergarten, SESA has been a partner not only in his educational life but out of-school life as well. SESA and Miss Angel worked carefully with his son's school. The expertise to deal with his son's vision impairment came from SESA and Miss Angel. At one point his son's vision was diagnosed as degenerative, which meant that he would lose most if not all of his sight. That was a difficult time. Angel and SESA were right there to help prepare for that possibility. The committee has heard great testimony on the educational impact, but SESA and Miss Angel have had a great social and cultural impact on his son and family. Miss Angel and SESA sent strategies and discussed those with the school and coaches so that his son was able to participate in basketball. Mr. Crow said he is appreciative of the academic support but that spilled over to the self-realization that his son could do things and visual impairment did not have to hold him back completely. He credits all that to Miss Angel and SESA.

10:15:19 AM

LISA VILLANO, President, Alaska Council for Exceptional Children, Shishmaref, Alaska, said that on behalf of all members of the council she supports full funding and extending SESA. Anyone would be hard pressed to find any member of the council that has not had a completely beneficial relationship with SESA. She is a special education teacher in Shishmaref. Being a student with a disability in rural Alaska can be isolating. There is not a whole lot of access to resources. SESA is such a light and beacon of hope. She would not be the teacher she is without the resources, training, and assistance from SESA. There is a financial impact, but this is a piece of the budget well worth keeping in place.

SENATOR MICCICHE said that for the other pools of funding, the FY19 total was \$3.5 million. FY19 was the first year SESA went into deficit. He asked what FY20 looks like.

MS. CURTIS clarified that Senator Micciche was referring to the schedule of revenue expenditures in Appendix D. She could not comment on that and suggested that perhaps Mr. Pillai could speak to the FY20 balances.

SENATOR MICCICHE replied that he did not need it now because it is not Finance, but he cannot help going into numbers. He asked why the Appendix B number served is higher than the total served

for the LID programs. He asked is that because of duplicity of services.

MS. CURTIS replied that Appendix B shows 355 in total. The map also shows 355.

SENATOR MICCICHE clarified that he saw 400 something in the chart earlier in the presentation.

MS. CURTIS said that page two talks about other programs that SESA has in addition to its LID programs. She is guessing that it referring to other individuals served, possibly by the autism resource center or other projects.

SENATOR MICCICHE replied that he can reach out to SESA for additional information.

[10:20:46 AM](#)

CHAIR HOLLAND held SB 19 in committee.

[10:21:04 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Holland adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 10:21 a.m.